# Quenti Lambardillion: A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics - Pointing With An Index Finger: "Five feet high with door and three may walk abreast"

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## Abstract

Discusses the process of creating his various concordances, glossaries, and indexes to Tolkien's languages.

## Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Languages—Dictionaries and indexes

# Quenꞇi Lambardillion

A Column on CDiddle-earꞇh Linguisꞇics by Paul Nolan Hyde

## Poinꞇing Wiꞇh An Index Finger: "Five Feeꞇ high ꞇhe door and ꞇhree may walk abreasꞇ"

In the opening pages of *The Hobbit* may be found the wonderful rune-filled map of the King under the Mountain, the Map of the Lonely Mountain. On the far left hand side of the map, a hand and pointing finger may be observed as part of that map. One might engage in endless arguments whether or not the hand actually looks like a dwarf's hand, or even the significance of the thumb paralleling the index finger, apparently sizing rather than pointing. The object in performing such nigglings may be opaque to most readers, but there are those among us whose predilections and emotions surface in such issues. However, neither of these two fascinating issues are the subject of present discourse. It does deal, however, with the significance that Gandalf places on the pointing finger and its metaphorical implications:

> "There is one point that you haven't noticed," said the wizard, "and that is the secret entrance. You see that rune on the West side, and the hand pointing to it from the other runes? That marks a hidden passage to the Lower Halls."

It is the pointing finger that opens the way, not only to the Lower Halls, but also serves as the vehicle for bringing about the entire happy resolution of the story. Had it not been for the discovery of the Door, Bilbo would have been seriously hampered in his clever awakening of the Dragon and the eventual re-establishment of the King under the Mountain once again in Erebor. The pointing finger, or the forefinger, or rather the index finger is the part of the hand which we typically use in order to focus our attention on a specific location or direction. The more specific we wish to be, the more assertive we become using the index finger. This whole line of reasoning is backwards, of course, for the idea of an "index finger" is a secondary semantic development growing out of the idea of an "index" itself.

Ever since I became academically interested in Tolkien's works, I have been an inordinate indexer. I began with the linguistic material, indexing each occurrence of the invented language elements in a way that I could use them to understand and hopefully explain to others what Tolkien was doing with his invention. Both for my Masters Thesis and my Doctoral Dissertation, I compiled extensive alphabetical lists of morphological elements as appendices to the main body of the text.

As the corpus of posthumous material annually increased, I determined to continue that indexing process. I had originally done everything by hand, using alphabetized notebook pages, 3x5 cards, envelopes, all with the intent that I could facilitate my exploration of linguistic Middle-earth. I have since met many others, both linguists and non-linguists, who have gone through the same painstaking process, to their endless frustration, each hoping that what they have done was really worth the time and effort.

As the possibilities of computer technology burst upon me, I found myself learning things about microprocessing that I never would have attempted on my own. (It is odd what we will subject ourselves to when we think that an overwhelming compulsion might be facilitated by filling our minds with ten thousand obtuse bits of information.) It was not long before I had acquire some expertise with data processing, programming languages of one sort or another, and the limitations of one piece of hardware as compared to another. As my finances would allow, I surrounded myself with increasingly more sophisticated technologies in order that I might expand the horizons of Tolkien Linguistic Studies. One of my early post-Doctoral attempts was "A Working Concordance", an indexing of language elements in Tolkien's primary works which were in print by the summer of 1987. All of this work was performed on a Commodore 64, using two disk drives, and software that I had written specifically for the task. It was a grueling task. As I recall, there were in excess of 8000 separate entries, with more than 100,000 references. I found this little labor quite rewarding for what I was trying to accomplish, and in an almost altruistic moment, I made it available to those who did not have the same masochistic tendencies that I do. The response was overwhelming, and it was not long before the "Concordance" was in its four or fifth limited printing. Some had the temerity to ask me for the data base on disk. I declined, I suppose, because the "child" was too much with me. I had gone through such great labor pains producing the thing, that I could not allow my unique relationship with it to be diluted.

Once I had the Concordance completed, I realized that in the translation process, a linguist has one foot planted in each language as he works a translation through. I felt that there was a need for some sort of English to Elvish index, one that would indicate which Elvish words were associated with the same English word. Thus, for another six months I made my way through all of the Middle-earth texts, indexing with a newly developed computer program, the second volume of my series of indices, "A Work-

ing English Lexicon". This modest volume met the light of day in January 1988 and has enjoyed several reprints as well. By this time, *The Lost Road* with its "Etymologies" had been published, and that great volume was included in the Lexicon. I lamented in my heart that I had not waited to do that volume in the Concordance.

My lament soon became a wail, and I knew that at some point I was going to have to deal with the more than 10,000 new entries found within the "Etymologies". In the course of acquiring an IMB XT Personal Computer, I became acquainted with R-Base 5000, an industrial-strength database program that promised to do things for Tolkien Linguistic Studies that I could never have accomplished on my own. In short order, I was making my way through all of the volumes isolating every linguistic element, its translation, its language reference, historical development, in short all of those things about which J.R.R. Tolkien had been specific. Thus was born, after almost a year of data input, the seven-volume "A Working Tolkien Glossary." It is hideous to almost everyone, save to its father. But it usefulness to me personally has been extraordinary. This, too, was made available, notwithstanding the inordinate cost of reproducing it. One of my fellow linguists wrote to me, after I had given his and my mailmen hernias, "Now, I am in a position to prove everything that Paul Nolan Hyde has written in the pages of *Mythlore* is bologna; I have my own grinder now." I was happy for him.

As I finished the "Glossary," I thought that there lacked one thing yet: a text or index that could make the inflected endings of the language elements more explicit. I devised a program that would take every word listed in the "Glossary" and spell it backwards and add it to the appropriate entry. These were subsequently re-alphabetized according to the reverse spelling and the two supplemental volumes, the Reverse Index and the Reverse Glossary came to be.

With all of these reference tools in hand I felt that I could at last really deal with the various translations that needed to be done with untranslated material, and also with material which did enjoy Tolkien's own translations in print. Work on "Narqelion" went apace primarily because these indices were available to me. There is no question in my mind that "Narqelion" would still be in a kind of translation limbo were it not for the fact that the Indices, Glossaries, and Concordances had already been accomplished. I hasten to add at this point, that not all who have these volumes use them accurately, myself included. There is still much work that needs to be accomplished in refining the tools and their application.

Since the Glossaries, Christopher Tolkien has published several volumes on the history of the writing of *The Lord of the Rings* which, obviously enough, are not indexed in the fashion that I have pursued in the past. I have been in another dilemma as to how to update or supplement what already in existence. The additional linguistic material found in these recent volumes is substantive, but not copious. I determined then to take another tack with the entire corpus which might prove useful not only to linguists, but also to the general body of Tolkien scholars and fans. I began at *The Hobbit*, indexing every volume again, this time referencing every proper name and phrase found in the books. I also re-indexed the language elements, but generally as they had to do with the proper names. All of the volume indices are complete except for *The War of the Ring*, which at this writing is half done. All of the Indices are from between 20 to 30 pages long except for *The Hobbit*. That Index is included in this issue of *Mythlore*. To my knowledge, there has never been an index of *The Hobbit*. I hope that this fills a perceived need.

## Conclusion

In *Mythlore* 54, I made a bit of a review of the linguistic contributions made over the years in the pages of *Mythlore* and the *Tolkien Journal*, together with many of the various arguments and controversies that the works of J.R.R. Tolkien have inspired. One of the letters cited was one that appeared in *Tolkien Journal* 3, by Mrs. Laird H. Barber. Her sentiments are in my estimation worth repeating here:

> Indexes and inquiries into names may not interest everyone, but they are helpful aids if one is working with *The Lord of the Rings*... It is a difficult work to study critically, simply because it is so large and so concisely written. Indexes and other such aids are, of course, secondary to the major critical questions *The Lord of the Rings* involves, Nevertheless, these factual inquiries should be done and made public (p. 13).

There are, indeed, hidden doors and Lower Halls in the Mountain that is Middle-earth. I would like to believe that maybe, just maybe, when the time is right, when Durin's Day is fading in a cloudy sunset, "a red ray of the sun will escape like a finger through a rent in the cloud" to point out the Door that leads to a more complete understanding of what has been accomplished by the Maker of the Mountain. I could not wish for you more.